

“Confession as Profession”

Second Sunday in Lent

Mark 8:27-38

“You are the Christ” Mark 8:29

I know a confirmation teacher who will play the game “Who am I?” with his confirmation students. The students love it not only because they get to see their teacher act like a fool. But also because it puts to the test their Bible knowledge that they learned throughout the years in Church, Sunday School, through devotions and Bible reading at home, and in confirmation class. Just as you would imagine the game being played, the teacher acts out various characters from the Bible and the confirmation students guess the character. In our Gospel reading we listen in on Jesus playing “Who am I?” with his disciples.

Who is Jesus? As he asks his disciples they came up with lots of flattering answers. Wouldn't we be flattered if someone said to you that you are charming or smart? Well, the disciples gave Jesus some flattering answers. They said “Some say you are that fiery preacher John the Baptist that people can't resist. Others say that you are Elijah who has come back again from long ago. Still others say that you are the prophet like Moses who was promised to come.” All flattering answers. All wrong answers.

There is but one answer of who Jesus is. There is but one true confession of the identity of Jesus. Peter has it right, “You are the Christ.” He doesn't have it by his own doing. It is the answer that the Holy Spirit gives (1 Corinthians 12:3). As Luther reminds us in his meaning to the 3rd article of the Apostles' Creed, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith” (“Small Catechism, 3rd Article of the Creed,” *LSB* 323).

When we believe that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Lord and that it depends on him coming to us and not us coming to him, we admit that the power of God's Word is true. We are sinners. We are in need of his atonement for our Sin and the Sin of the whole world. That we receive the forgiveness purchased through his atonement by grace through faith and trust in Christ, the firstborn Son, our faithful brother. This is the only answer.

We must also realize that this confession is not just to be believed. This confession that is our confession and answer of Jesus' identity is also for profession. That is to say, it also has to go out. It has to be shared. We are all part of God's plan in proclaiming and taking that message out.

I once heard a story about a “taking the message out” experience that a friend of mine had while he was training in the Seminary. While on one of his breaks from studies he decided to fly home to spend time with family and friends. He arrived at the airport terminal and sat down to wait for his flight next to a

woman whom he later discovered has down syndrome. Shortly after he sat down the woman proceeded to ask him three questions.

First, the woman asked him, "Are you having a good day?" He said, "Yes, I am having a good day." She then asked him, "Have you brushed your teeth?" He said, "Yes, I have brushed my teeth today." She said, "That is good because everyone should brush their teeth." Then she asked a third and final question. She asked, "Do you believe in Jesus." He said confidently with a big smile, "Yes I do." She said, "That is good because everyone should believe in Jesus." Confession as profession just sitting there in the airport.

A short while later a man came and sat next to my friend so that he was in the middle of this gentleman and the woman. He sat down and opened up a copy of the *New York Times* and began reading. The woman then looked at my friend and said, motioning to the other man, "Now ask him."

So my friend did just that. He turned to the man and he said, "Sir, my friend to my right would like to know are you having a good day?" He looked at the both of them and said, "Yes, I am having a very good day." My friend said, "Good, everyone should have a good day." The woman then nudged my friend and said, "Ask him again." So he then turned to the man and said, "My friend to my right would also like to know if you brushed your teeth today?" The man said, "Well, yes, I brushed my teeth." By this time my friend was feeling a little uneasy because he knew what was coming next. Sure enough the woman said to my friend, "Now I want you to ask him the other question."

Many of us have been Christians most of our lives. Many of us have believed and confessed the answer of Jesus' identity many times. But how many of us let that confession go out? How many of us profess it? Sure we may proclaim and profess it together on Sunday morning through prayers, songs, hymns, the liturgy, and in the words of the Apostles' and Nicene creeds. But that is with other Christians. That is with other believers and confessors of the faith. How many of us have let that confession go out in a public place like an airport? How many of us have the courage and confidence to make our confession public in front of those whose confession of Jesus we are unaware? Those who may even be non-Christians?

Understandably so, my friend was nervous. Like many of us, he had been a Christian his whole life but had never done anything like what he was about to do, especially not in a public place like an airport. By the grace of God he received the courage and confidence to ask. He said, "Sir, we would both like to know, do you believe in Jesus?" My friend then braced himself for what might happen. But what happened was surprising.

As my friend tells the story, the man got red in the face and put down his paper. But then he did something unexpected. He said, "My life is so empty and I can't believe how empty I feel." He started crying and then said through his tears, "Will you tell me about Jesus?" So my friend did just that.

He told him, as we would say, the Law of God that expresses God's Holy Will for our lives and functions as a mirror to show us our identity as sinners, as those who miss the mark and have need of God's forgiveness and righteousness that only he can give. My friend then shared with him the sweet news of the Gospel that shows us our Savior and all that God has done for us in Christ to bring his forgiveness and righteousness. He then prayed with the man right there in the airport.

As my friend tells the story, sometime later he was checking his mailbox and he found a letter from this man that said he is now part of a church. My friend ended the story by saying, "You just never know." That is why the confession needs to go out. That is why we profess what we confess.

The proclamation started with a woman who had a profound impact and influence on my friend. She gave him the courage to proclaim his confession which then had a profound impact and influence on my friend.

For all of us today Christ is the Son of the Living God. In your own situation wherever you are pray for the courage to take that confession out and profess it. It is not your work it is the Holy Spirit's work. It is not your mission it is God's mission. But it is part of denying ourselves and taking up our cross and following our Lord wherever he should lead. An airport. A grocery store. The streets of our neighborhood. The halls of our workplace. The cafeteria of a school. Wherever you are.

It is your confession because it is God's confession. Let us go forth in his name. In Jesus' name. Amen.